REVOLUTIONARY WAR UNIFORMS:
CONSTRUCTION DETAILS & FINISHING TOUCHES

by
Henry M. Cooke IV
Historical Costumer/Consultant

"When a soldier can be brought to take delight in his dress, it will be easy to mould him to whatever else may be desired, as it is in general a proof that he has thrown off the sullen, stubborn disposition which characterizes the peasants of most countries; therefore every method should be pursued to accomplish what may so justly be looked on, as the foundation of order and oeconomy in a Corps."

Bennet Cuthbertson
A System for the Compleat Interior Management
and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry
(Dublin, 1768)

There's something about the sight of a soldier in uniform that stirs the emotions. Military uniforms convey a variety of messages to those who view them. Nationality, regiment, rank and length of service are expressed directly, while the appearance of a national armed force in uniform serves to reinforce a sense of national identity while at the same time sets the soldier apart from society as a member of a unique community.

As we can see from Capt. Cuthbertson, military uniforms in the eighteenth century evoked a similar response from the viewer, enhanced by the colorful uniforms with their shiny buttons and lace and braid trimmings that made soldiers stand out dramatically from the ordinary citizens from whom the army was drawn.

Our task in reproducing the military uniforms of the combatant forces of the American Revolution is to re-create the "look" that was characteristic of that era. In order to do so in a credible manner, we need to rediscover the art of the tailors craft of that time, to "get into their heads" to better understand how and why uniforms were constructed as they were. With this knowledge we are better able to re-create a uniform whose appearance and fit compares favorably with the historic artifact.

The challenge of reproducing 18th century military clothing lies in the relative paucity of original examples, especially the uniforms of the common soldier. The coarse, cheap woolen textiles and the hard service that they were put through, as well as the general absence of laundering resulted in all but a few of the uniforms wearing out. Those remaining then had to survive two hundred years of exposure to light, heat, excess moisture, mold and mildew, insect pests and vermin which has winnowed the field down to the few uniform items in public and private collections.

So our efforts to recreate clothing are based on a few surviving samples, coupled with our knowledge of civilian clothing construction details. The author refers the reader to "Rich in Detail: The Anatomy of Men's Coats, 1750 - 1790", an excellent in-depth examination of the construction and finishing details of men's coats by Richard Hill of Colonial Williamsburg, which was published as part of the 1994 Tidy's Symposium.

In addition to original clothing, we can get a sense of the appearance of these uniform by looking at contemporary images of soldiers. Not only do they furnish details of color, style,and decoration but they allow us to see the ideal silhouette, the "look" of the era. One of the finest collections of images of soldiers, uniforms, and equipment details is the Anne S.K.Brown Collection at Brown University. The collection also includes the written regulations that established the appearance of Europe's armies throughout the age of the "Lace Wars".

Details of construction and finishing can also be gleaned from examination of period diaries, orderly books, and published works. Waistcoat materials are found in Cuthbertson's, System for the Compleat Interior Management of a Battalion of Infantry, which refers to the provision of 3/8 yard of cloth for the front of a waistcoat, with the back of frieze, the front facing to be made out of baize, a lighter, thinner woolen cloth, and the lining made of coarse linen[1]. Resolves of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress of 1775 make allowances for the use of mohair or worsted thread for buttonholes, as well as staying for the front opening of the coat[2]. The French Reglement of 1779 notes the use of linen staying and linen reinforcements at the top of each side vent and the rear vent to prevent tearing[3].

Selection of Materials

Proper material selection is important to achieving the right fit and silhouette. Once you've done your homework to determine the appropriate colors and cut of the uniform, you need to get the right materials.

In the 18th century, the quality of the cloth, and the richness of trimmings created visible distinctions between officers, sergeants, and the enlisted ranks. Officers wore fine or superfine broadcloth, a fine, thin, smooth finished woolen cloth with a firm hand. It was bleached or dyed with care and finished with a short lustrous covering nap. Dyeing with cochineal and tin mordant yielded the scarlet used for British officers coats. Sergeants cloth was a lesser quality broadcloth, better than the rank and file, but coarser than that worn by his superiors. It was also dyed scarlet, but a cheaper version of that applied to the quality goods. The soldier's clothing was made of coarse broad-cloth, kersey, and baize, inexpensive textiles well calculated for the hard service of soldiering. Specifications for cloth for British Army coats

required that it be at least 25 ounces per square yard[4]. Instead of bleaching, soldiers would wear cloth that was the natural color of the undyed grey goods. If it was dyed, it was accomplished with less expensive dyes such as madder and indigo.

Each cloth drapes differently, with the coarse goods draping more stiffly than the lighter finer cloths used by the officers. Thus, they could be tailored to fit more elegantly than the mass manufactured soldiers clothes.

Coats and waistcoats were often lined with wool. In the 1770's soldier's coat linings were undergoing a transition from baize to a thin, coarse woolen or worsted serge. Officers generally lined their coats with shalloon, a fine, twill woven woolen, and occasionally lined their clothes in silk. For service in the West Indies, many French and British regiments replaced their wool linings with those of coarse scotch linen.

In choosing materials to use for coats, waistcoats, and breeches, one should remember that the shells of coats and waistcoats were typically made with most free edges finished with a cut edge, so the woolens used should be able to withstand wear and retain a good edge. The linings were much thinner and coarser, and of more tightly twisted yarns which tend to ravel, and thus were finished with turned edges.

Fitting the Uniform

The fit of the uniform is essential in achieving "the look". Historically, uniforms of the United States and most European armies were made up in two or three standard sizes at the point of manufacture, then shipped to the regiments, where regimental tailors would adjust the fit of the uniform components to the individual soldiers. The importance of this procedure was not merely sartorial splendor; poorly fitted clothing hindered movement and caused premature failure of the garments; secondly, the crossbelts and other accouterments were fitted over the uniform, and if the clothes did not hang right, neither would the equipment.

In our discussion of the enlisted uniform it must be borne in mind that they were to be constructed as cheaply and quickly as possible in order to garner the greatest profit to the contractor. The coarse uniform cloth had to be shrunk before being made into clothing, but often was not. As a result, clothing was often made that was too small, or crudely stitched together so that when it arrived at its point of distribution, it had to be fitted, taken apart, and remade.

This brings us to the question; what is the proper fit of a Revolutionary War era uniform? While each army defined its own standards, they are all pretty similar, and can be summed up thus: the clothes should fit closely but without constraint to movement, especially in the arms and shoulders. To achieve this end, garments were cut to take the best advantage of the inherent qualities of the cloth, while still permitting economical cutting with minimal waste.

The overall proportions of the coat were pretty consistent by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and were defined by the "rule of eighths" which was described in General Robert Howe's orders to officers of the Massachusetts Line in 1781:

"...the length of the coat, to the upper part of the knee-pan, and to be cut high in the neck. As 3 is to 5; so is the skirts to the waist of the coat; or divide the whole length of the coat into eight equal parts, take five for the waist and three for the skirts."[5]

If we turn to contemporary sources they can tell us much about the fit and finish of the several articl of uniform clothing. For example, Bennet Cuthbertson and Thomas Simes offer the followi suggestions for the fit and finish of military coats:

Article V

" When the Coats of a Company are altered, the Officer commanding it must carefully examine, if every man is exactly fitted, without wrinkles in any part, at the same time that he is not confined, either in his arms or shoulders; he is also to insist on the lining, lapells, cuffs and seams being worked in the strongest manner; that the lace be well sewed on, the collar high and tight about the neck, and that the cuffs be in length, just to the joint of the wrist:"

Article VII

" A soldier's coat should always be tight over the breast (without restraint) for the sake of shewing his figure to more advantage;"

Article XII

" The cuff of a soldier's coat should never be wider, than just to admit his hand with ease: laying aside the superior look of it above a large one, it certainly, from being close about the wrist, is infinitely warmer, and enables a man to handle his firelock with greater dexterity, as he meets with nothing to entangle in the lock of it, or in any particular to incommode his performance." [6]

"...the escutcheon of the bottom of the side-seam of the coat to be well secured from ripping by a neat loop, and the opening of the back-skirt to be sewed down as low as the bottom of the second loop and secured there from ripping by a neat loop; the bottom of the lapels to be well stitched; the shoulder straps to be made high on the shoulder, and sewed down flat one inch, so that the remaining part, when unbuttoned, may fall along the arm; and when buttoned, to be of sufficient length to contain the shoulder belt with ease and no longer: the skirts of the coats to be sewed together, and a piece of red cloth, near three inches long, and almost two in length, with a narrow square lace put on at the corners, and a button in the center of the cloth; one of these to be sewed to the point of each skirt."[7]

Likewise, they offer additional information on waistcoats:

" All waistcoats must cover the soldier well, and to be made full in every part: they are to be cut square at the bottom, and to open back from the lowermost buttonhole to the point: which lower button and hole are to cover the lower part of the waistband of the breeches: the backseam of the waistcoat to be sewed down as low as the lower part of the waistband of the breeches, and to be strengthened at the bottom of the side seam:"[8]

Also for breeches:

"...the new breeches to be double sewed in all the seams, and made to fit easy, full and well;"

"...the breeches to be made full in the seat, to come well over the hips and low under the knee, with a strap for the buckle, and four buttons and button-holes on each side." [9]

"...the breeches are next to be altered,...they must be made to fit smooth and tight upon the thighs, to cover well the knee-pan; to come very high upon the hips, with a broad waistband capable of holding three large buttons: it should also be insisted on, that they are worked both strong and uniform in every respect, and that a strap of cloth be stitched firmly between the thighs, which can be readily renewed, when worn out, and will contribute much to their doing greater service."

"...a falling flap to the breeches, with two large buttons to fix it to the waist-band, appears always tight and smooth, and it is to be preferred to any other: one cross pocket of moderate depth, is all a soldier need desire in his breeches, as it will answer every purpose he can want."[10]

Cutting Out

The tailor's craft of the eighteenth century was referred to as the art of cutting, because the fit of a garment was determined to a large degree by the expertise of the tailor in wielding his shears, cutting the cloth before him to yield maximum fit while using a minimum amount of cloth. This was especially true in the cutting of uniform clothing. We have seen that the choice of fabrics was determined by economic considerations. So too, was the way in which a factor would cut out the hundreds of coats, waistcoats, and breeches for a regiment. Frederick the Great, in his Oeconomical Regulations, even went so far as to provide descriptions or cutting diagrams for mass production of a single garment component to permit the most efficient use of the cloth (Fig. 1).[11] By contrast, we normally only have to reproduce a single uniform at any given time, yet have to maintain consistency from one uniform to the next.

Rockärmel:
2 Ärmel aus ½ Elle Tuch „7½ Viertel breit". Wie die eingezeichneten Schnitteile für den linken Ärmel des Dragoner-Rocks D III von 1786 zeigen, reicht die vorgeschriebene Stoffmenge aus, wenn mehrere Ärmelschnitte nacheinander und – entgegen der Regel – in Schußrichtung eingelegt werden.

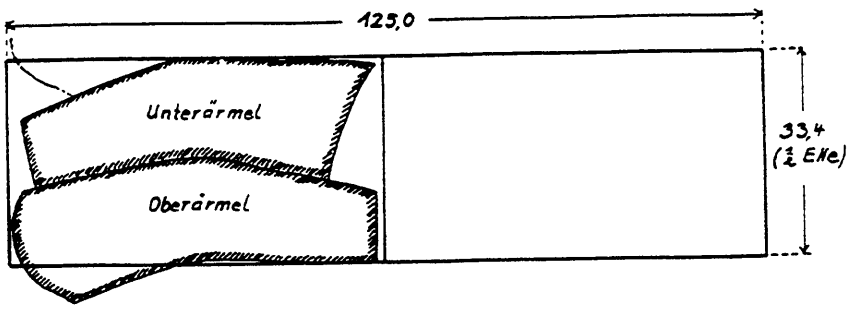


Figure 1: Cutting Diagram from Oeconomical Regulations

The coat, in particular, needs care in cutting to achieve the right fit. The back of the coat should be cut narrow in the waist, full in the shoulders, and should be laid out on the cloth with the back seam running slightly off grain to permit the back to draw into the small of the back at the waist, while affording a small amount of give across the shoulder blades (Fig. 2). The front should be laid out with the hem aligned at right angles to the straight grain, which should result in the front seam running on or slightly off the straight grain to allow the front to fall from the shoulder in a smooth line without wrinkles (Fig. 2). The sleeves should be laid out with the back seam of the upper arm running nearly along the straight, which results in the forearm running on or near the bias. In this way, the sleeves can be fitted close to the arm, yet allow considerable flexibility in the handling of a musket (Fig. 2).

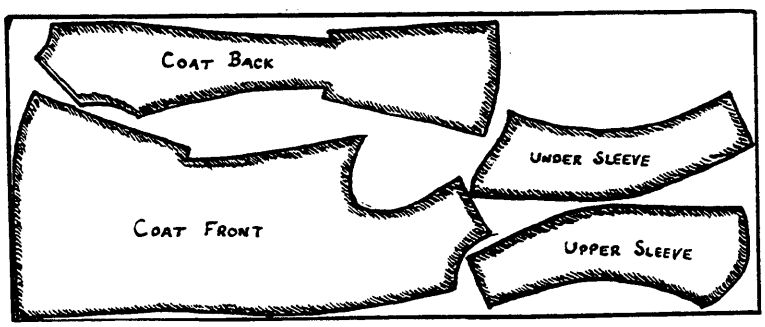


Figure 2 : Cutting Diagram for Regimental Coat.

The waistcoat is fairly straightforward in its layout, with the front aligned to the straight grain, while the back seam is laid out along the straight grain (Fig. 3).

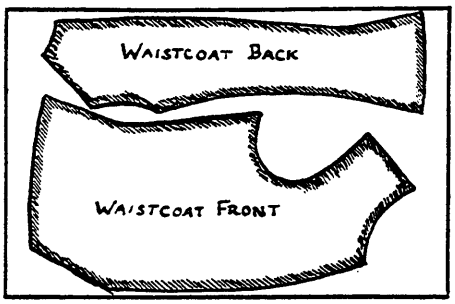


Figure 3: Cutting Diagram for Waistcoat.

The breeches also depend upon layout to allow the inseam to fit high and snug in the crotch, and fit smooth over the legs, yet permit flexibility of movement. The front seam of the fall strikes off the straight grain, while the inseam runs close to the bias. The outseam, on the other hand, should run fairly close to the straight of the cloth. The knee should be cut with a rounding, which is eased onto the knee band to form a slight concave pocket for the knee cap. On the back panel, the legs are cut much like the front, and the center back seam falls on or near the bias of the cloth (Fig.4). It is at the top of the back that the garment can be pieced if necessary without compromising its appearance or strength.

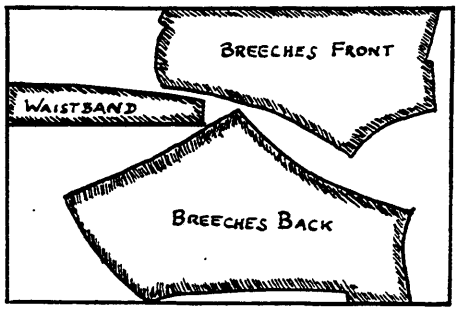


Figure 4: Cutting Diagram for Breeches

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS FOR REGIMENTAL COATS

The glory of the soldier's uniform was his regimental coat. It was made of wool coating in a ground color that identified his national origin or branch distinction; red for the British army, Prussian Blue for the Prussian troops and their satellite states, white for the Austrian and Spanish armies, and green for the Russians. The French army, one of the largest in Europe, clothed its own nationals in white, its Irish, Scots, and Swiss regiments in red, and its German regiments in sky blue. Individual regiments were further distinguished by cuffs, collars, and lapels in a variety of colors and configurations, and white or yellow metal buttons marked with a regimental number or other designation. The troops of the fledgling United States utilized uniforms from both domestic and foreign sources, including uniforms made in France and British uniforms captured by American privateers. After wearing a variety of styles and colors, uniform regulations were developed in October of 1779 which set an ideal standard of a coat of a blue ground with white lining, and white, buff, red, or blue facings depending on geographic region, and embellished with white buttons with a "USA" monogram cast into their face. Though these coats varied in overall appearance from one another, they do share common attributes which we can discuss in the following sections.

Interfacing the Coat

To preserve the smooth front line of the coat, as well as to provide a firm base for attaching buttons, it is necessary to apply an interfacing of coarse linen or linen canvas along the center front edges of the coat (Fig. 5). Richard Hill gives an excellent description of the interfacing of dress coats that is applicable to officer's coats[12]. For enlisted men, it appears that a layer of coarse linen or linen canvas was applied along the front edges of the coat extending from the neck to just below the lapels. The linen is applied to the inside of the coat about 1/8" in from the edge, where it is tacked down with a running or pad stitch, 3-4 stitches per inch (Fig. 6).

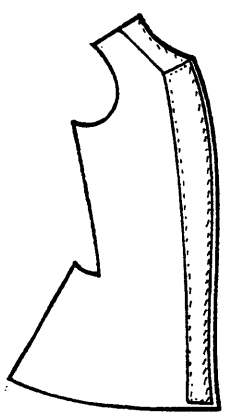


Figure 5: Interfacing on Officer's Coat

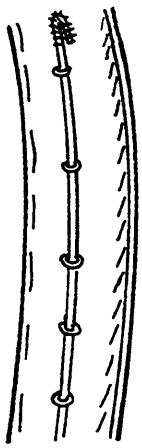


Figure 5a:

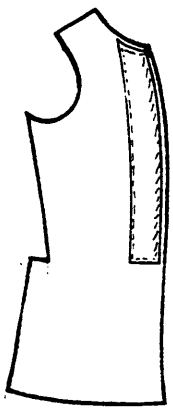
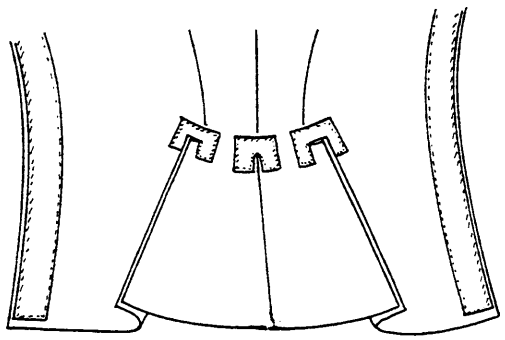


Figure 6: Interfacing on Enlisted Coat

Some coats, especially those of officers, had reinforcements at the tops of the side and center back vents (Fig.7). These rectangles of linen or canvas were carefully sewn over the tops of the vents with a running or overcasting stitch to prevent the vents from splitting.



Pockets and Flaps

After the Seven Year's War, many armies revised their clothing regulations to make their uniforms less bulky and more streamlined in order to allow soldiers to perform the close order tactics developed by the Prussians under Frederick the Great. Coat bodies became narrower and more swept back, the full skirts were reduced to a few shallow pleats, and pockets were moved from the shell to the lining.

Pocket flaps were retained,as a cloth flap stitched to the body of the coat with a running stitch on its free edges and whip stitched along the folded top edge of the flap. In some cases the flaps were reduced to a vestigial form, with the flap replaced by an outline of the flap shape in regimental lace, or in the case of the French coats, a line of stitching edged with a colored passepoil (Fig. 8). On some officer's coats, such as that of Continental Army A.D.C. Tench Tilghman, functional pocket flaps were retained along with pocket bags set into the shell of the coat. In such cases, the pockets would be treated in the same was as their counterparts on civilian fashion (Fig. 9). In either case the flaps should be located in such a way that the top or folded edge of the flap is on a line with the hip button at the top of the side pleat and the bottom of the lapel.

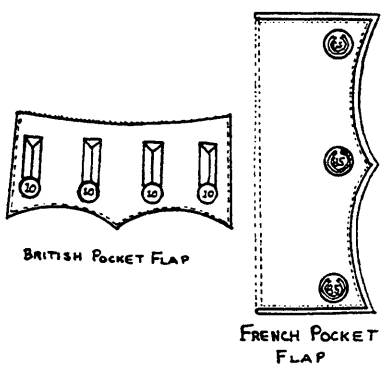


Figure 8: Pocket Flaps

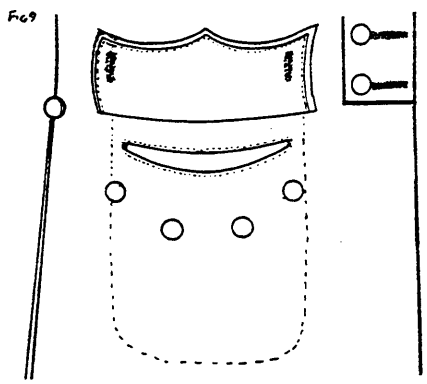


Figure 9: Functional Pocket

The pockets in the lining were made with a reinforcing placket of lining cloth, about six inches long by one inch wide, folded at the top, and topstitched along its short sides. The pocket bag was about six inches wide by eight to ten inches deep, and attached to the slit in the lining (Fig. 10).

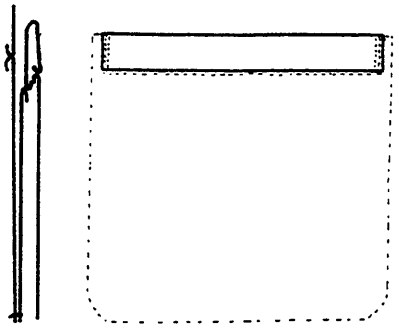


Figure 10: Lining Pocket

Cape Collar

Another of the changes introduced to the uniform in the 1760's was the addition of a cape collar or standing collar to the neck of the coat. The French tended to favor the standing collar, while the British, and later Americans preferred the cape or falling collar, which was undoubtedly useful in service in the changeable weather of the North American colonies:

"Article X

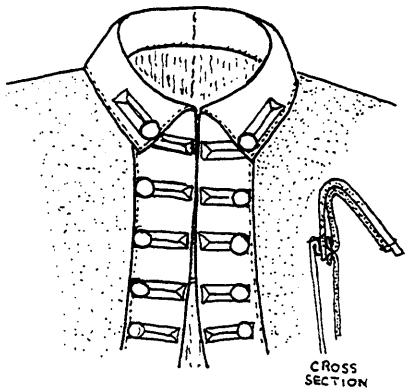
Capes, besides being ornamental to a soldier's coat, are beyond doubt extremely useful, in defending his neck from rain and cold, when on centry on an exposed bleak post: they should not however be broader than three fingers; and to prevent their rising, when not required, ought to button upon the upper buttons of the lapells."[13]

The cape collar consisted of an upper and under collar, the former of the regiment's distinctive facing color wool, and the latter of the coat shell cloth. It could be made with or without a peak or point at the back of the neck. The under collar is attached to the neck edge of the coat, with the upper collar stitched with brown linen thread in a running stitch on the enlisted coat, and backstitched in silk on the officer's coat (Fig. 11a).

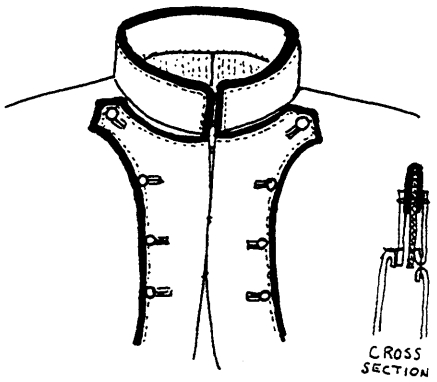
The standing collar was composed of two straight strips of cloth with a folded layer of linen canvas or buckram sandwiched in between to provide it with stability. The French collar was lisereed in the facing color. This was an extension of the inner or lining part of the collar, 1/8" beyond the edge of the outer portion of the collar and exposing a strip of color (Fig.11b).

Figure 11 : Collars

11a



11b



Cuffs

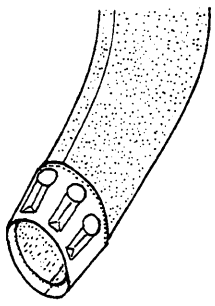
As part of the streamlining of military dress of the 1760s, cuffs diminished in size and became more closely fitted to the arm. By the time of the American Revolution, many cuffs ceased to be functional. Both functional and non-functional cuffs could be embellished with worked buttonholes or regimental lace, and usually had either three or four buttons.

The vestigial cuff was a single layer of cloth, sometimes interfaced in linen canvas, with its upper extremity folded down over the canvas. This was stitched to the sleeve with either a running stitch for enlisted men, or backstitch for officers. The lower 1 1/4" of the cuff was folded up inside the sleeve, and tacked in place (Fig. 12a).

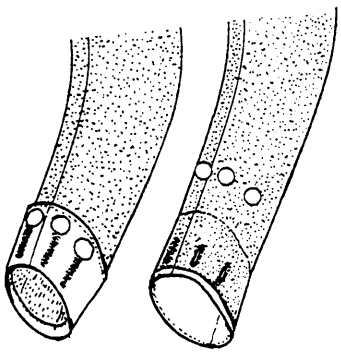
Despite the use of false cuffs, many coats still continued to use the bulkier functional cuff, which could be turned down to protect the hands in cold weather. In this style, the under cuff of shell cloth was sewn to the sleeve and the seam allowance pressed open. The upper cuff of the facing color was then sewn with a running or backstitch to the upper edge of the under cuff, with the lower 1 1/4" turned up inside the sleeve where it was tacked in place (Fig. 12b).

Figure 12: Functional and Nonfunctional Cuffs

12a



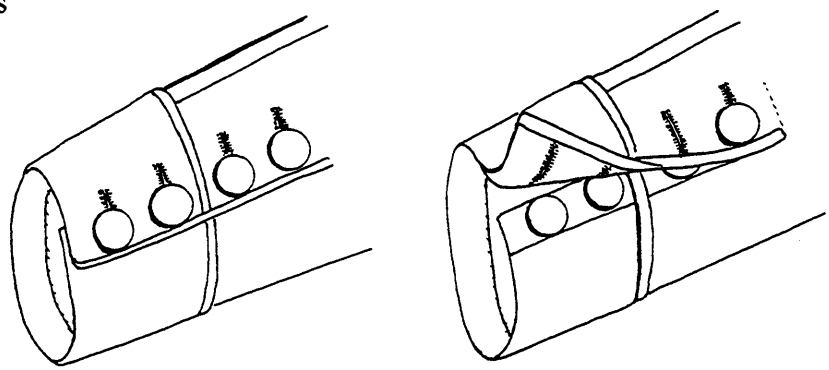
12b



One of the drawbacks of the closer fitting cuff was that if made too tight, soldiers could not remove their hands from their sleeves. To resolve this, military tailors adapted the common mariners cuff as a functional flapped cuff. In this cuff, a false round cuff was sewn to the sleeve. The sleeve and cuff were then slit, and a flap was sewn to the rear edge of the slit. The front edges of the slit were turned under

and stitched together. Buttonholes were then worked on the finished front edge of the sleeve and buttons attached to the flap which ran under the front edge of the slit to allow it to be buttoned (Fig.13)

Figure 13: Slit Cuffs



FRENCH CUFF 1779 - LEFT SLEEVE

Lapels

Lapels were the most distinctive feature of a military coat. Constructed in a contrasting color wool to that of the body, they helped to provide a means of regimental identification, especially if embellished with distinctive taped or piped trimmings and regimentally marked buttons. They were made to lie flat against the body of the coat, yet were often made so they could be buttoned across the breast for warmth.

On some enlisted coats the lapels were simply a layer of the distinctive facing colored wool sewn flat against the body with a simple running stitch, 4 - 8 stitches per inch, with the free edge turned under the center front edge of the body and tacked down (Fig. 14).

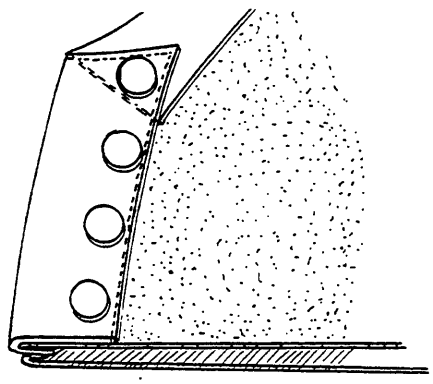


Figure 14: False Lapel

Many coats had lapels that were functional, with buttonholes that permitted them to be worn buttoned across the breast. They were composed of an upper lapel of the facing color, and an under lapel of the same cloth as the body of the coat (Fig.15). In this case, the facing cloth of the upper lapel was cut so as to extend 1/2" to 3/4" beyond the center front edge of the under lapel. On enlisted coats, the lapels were generally sewn together with brown linen thread, using a running stitch of 4-8 stitches per inch along the free edges of the lapel, approximately 1/8" to 1/4" in from the cut edge. On officers coats, this seam could also be worked in silk with a backstitch, 10-12 stitches per inch. In this case, once the parts were sewn together, the edges of the under lapel would be cut back about 1/16" to 1/8", revealing a thin

edge of facing color when the lapels were buttoned across the body. On coats of the French Army, the lapels were edged with a passepoil, a folded piece of wool sandwiched between the upper and under lapels with the folded edge projecting 1/8" beyond the edge of the lapel (Fig. 16).

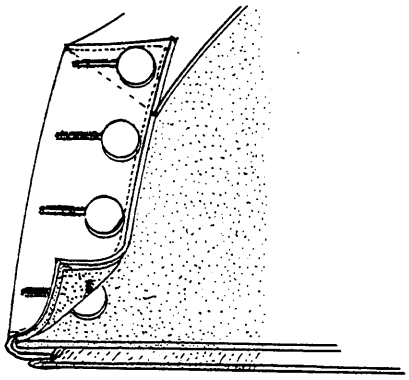


Figure 15: Lapels

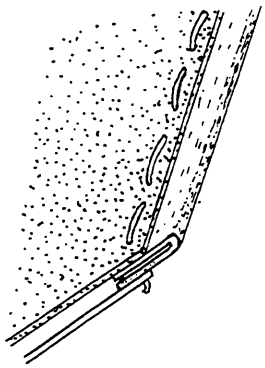


Figure 16: Passepoil

Buttonholes on functional lapels could be worked either plain or fancy depending on the rank of the wearer and whether they were to receive further embellishment with tape, lace, or embroidery. In the latter case, they would merely bind over the cut edges with an overcasting stitch, then the trim would be applied over the buttonhole, sometimes in a distinctive pattern (Fig. 17). If the buttonholes were to stand alone on enlisted lapels, they would be worked with a buttonhole stitch in worsted or mohair thread over the cut edge of the slit slightly longer than the button. By contrast, the buttonholes on an officer's lapels would be worked in a buttonhole stitch with silk twist over a waxed linen or silk cord, in the same manner as their civilian counterparts, often extending across the lapel as a decorative buttonhole, with about an inch made functional.

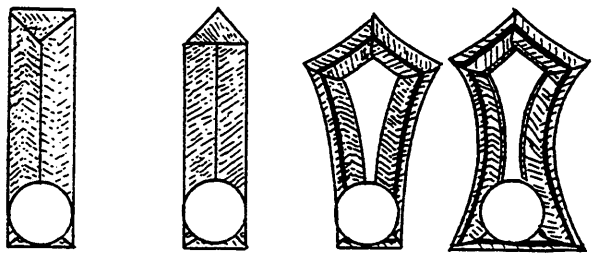


Figure 17: Buttonhole Trims

If the buttonholes were to be trimmed with regimental lace, a type of twill or herringbone pattern tape with stripes or worms woven into the off-white ground, the loops were to be "strongly sewed on" with a close running stitch along the inside and outside edges of the tape, approximately 8 stitches per inch.

The lapels should be attached to the body of the coat by means of a backstitch or combination of running and backstitch in linen thread, worked from the inside of the shell along the center front edge

and stitching through the shell and under lapel, about 1/16" in from the edge, taking care to double stitch the lapel at the top and bottom for extra strength. Then the extended edge of the upper lapel is turned over the cut edge and tacked to the inside of the shell with a running stitch (Fig.18).

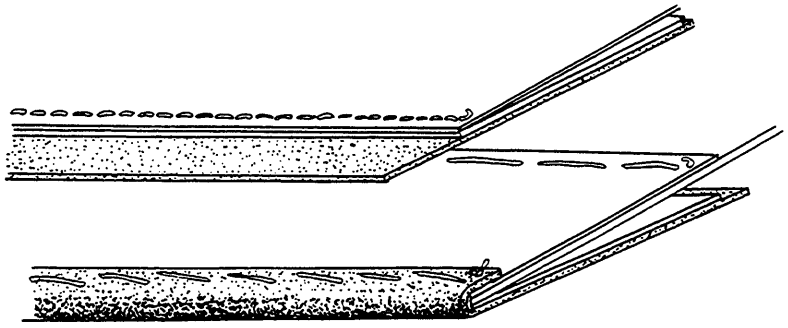


Figure 18: Attachment of Lapels to Coat Body

Once the lapels are attached to the body, the buttons may be fixed to the coat. On some coats this was achieved by sewing the shank of the button to the shell. Enlisted men's coats in British and some American regiments had their buttons attached by making a hole in the coat shell, pushing the button shank through the shell and interfacing, and fixing them in place by means of a strip of fabric or a leather cord run through the shank eyelet or loop (Fig. 19). This method of attachment may be used for buttons elsewhere on the coat, as well as for the waistcoat front and the breeches buttons.

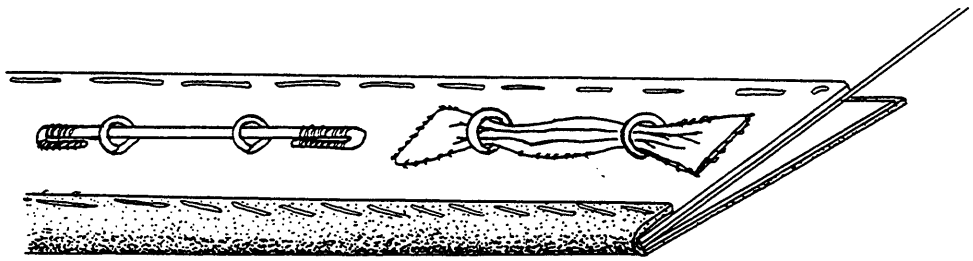


Figure 19: Button Attachment

Prior to assembling the lining into the shell, the hooks and eyes need to be sewn to the corners of the skirts and along the center front edges of the lapels. Typically, three or four sets of hooks and eyes would be located at equal intervals between the upper end of the lapel and the point of the breast, approximately the level of the fourth buttonhole (Fig.20). On the corners of the skirts, the hooks are sewn to the front corners, with the chape of the hook facing toward the inside of the coat, and the eyes are sewn to the rear corners, with the corner of the shell just covering the loop of the eye.

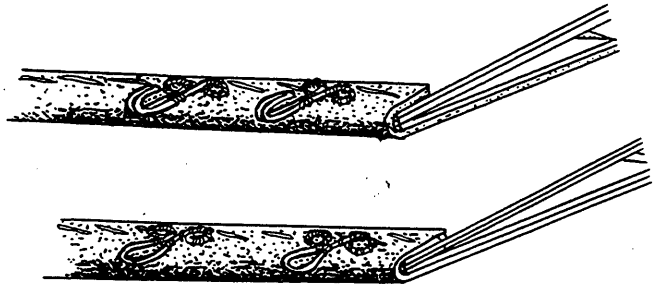


Figure 20: Hook & Eye Attachment

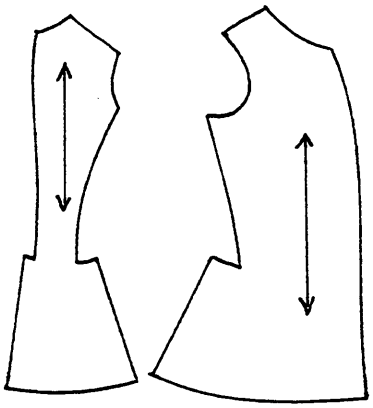
Assembly of Lining into the Body of the Coat

In many artifact civilian coats, the lining was only partially constructed before it was set into the coat shell. It is likely that many officer's coat linings were constructed in this manner. In the case of enlisted soldiers coats, too few originals survive with linings intact to permit us to draw any broad conclusions. Depending on where the regiment was serving, the coat may have been fully lined in wool or linen, partially lined in wool, or unlined except for a facing strip along the front and hem edges. The sleeves could also be lined in linen, occasionally in wool, and often were unlined.

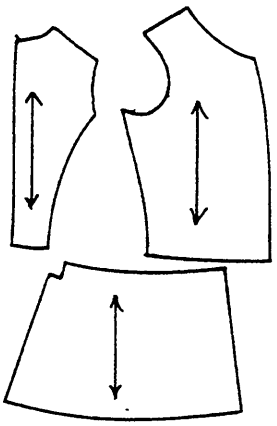
Body linings in enlisted coats seem to be of two styles: In the first, the lining is composed of a front panel and a rear panel which extend from the shoulder to the hem (Figure 21a). A second type, the lining is made up of front and rear panels extending from the shoulder to the waist, with a third panel which extends from the waist to the hem and spanning from the center front to the center back of the coat (Figure 21b). Each has its advantages. In the former, the long side seams permitted easy alterations. In the latter, the smaller panels used cloth more economically.

Figure 21: Coat Linings

21a



21b



Once you have your lining to the point where you are ready to install it in the coat, you can begin to pin it into place. Commencing at the neck line, turn under the seam allowance of the lining and pin it against the seam line of the cape and coat body. Stitch this down with a whip stitch, 6-8 stitches per inch. Then, pin the armhole edges of the lining the armholes of the shell, fitting it in smoothly and evenly. Stitch around each armhole with a basting stitch, about 4 stitches per inch. Lay in the lining along the side seams and baste in place if needed. Then, working down the front of each side, turn under and pin the lining to the shell from the neck edge to the hem, keeping the folded edge of the lining about 1/8" in from the edge of the front. Stitch the front and rear seams with a fine running stitch of 10 stitches per inch. Where your lining meets with the hooks and eyes, the lining should be laid over the loops fastening the hardware to the lapels, but allow the eyes and hook working surfaces to remain exposed. By sandwiching the hooks and eyes, you help to strengthen them and their ability to fasten the front line of the coat. When you reach the front and rear corners of the hem, you will do the same thing with those hooks and eyes. Next, begin turning and pinning the lining beginning at the top of the rear vent and working down each side of the center back opening, and stitch with a running stitch as described for the

center front seams. If you are constructing an officers coat, you will next turn and pin your lining to the edges of the pleats in the same manner as you have done with the front and back edges. Finally, turn up the hem of the lining so that the turned edge is approximately 1/4" from the cut edge of the coat shell.

Side Vents: Pleats and False Pleats

As noted earlier, one of the changes introduced to streamline the soldiers coat after the Prussian model was the reduction of the side pleats to a simple pleated joint, and the elimination of the inverted pleat from the back skirts (Fig. 22). The French carried this a step further and eliminated the side pleats altogether, reducing them to a continuation of the side seam, with a hip button marking the demarcation between the side seam and the skirts. Officers coats continued to have pleated side skirts, though reduced in volume from their former glory (Fig.23) The officer's pleats were finished in much same way as his civilian counterparts. The pleats were stitched together at the top of the vent, and tacked together at a couple of points along the pleat. The pleats could also be reinforced with a couple of thread loops to keep the skirts from spreading too far.[14]

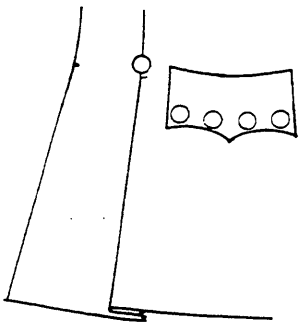


Figure 22: Enlisted Coat Pleat

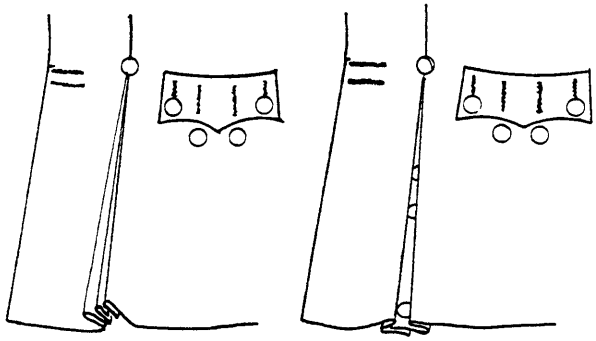
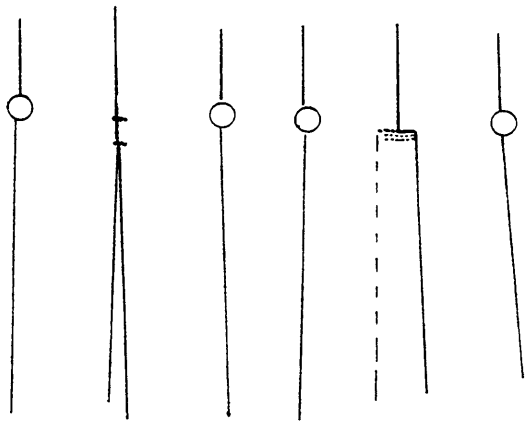


Figure 23: Officer's Coat Pleat

Back Vent

There were two ways to finish the rear vent of the coat. On most British coats the center back edges of the skirts met at the waist without overlapping, and were strengthened by means of a bar tack or thread loop at the top of the vent. The second style, used on many American and French coats and later adopted by some British regiments was a vent where the two sides of the back had a 1/2" to 1" right over left overlap at the waist (Fig. 24). On this type of vent the overlap is fixed together by two rows of back stitching.

Figure 24: Rear Vent Finishes



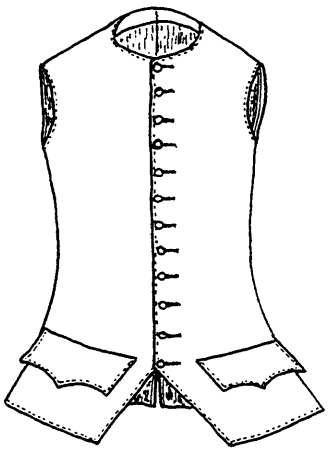
WAISTCOATS

Waistcoats could be made of linen or wool, depending on season and location. In a typical year, the average British or American soldier during War for Independence could expect to receive a regimental coat, along with a woolen and a linen waistcoat, and a pair each of woolen and linen breeches.

The waistcoat was made to fit close through the chest and waist, so as to fit smoothly underneath the regimental coat. They were made to button so low as to cover the waistband of the breeches. The skirts, which had been diminishing in length throughout the century, extended about six inches deep from the waist, and cut back at a sharp angle from the lowermost button.

During the 1770's a new fashion of waistcoat was coming into use in both civilian and military circles. Under the Reglement of 1776 and 1779, French soldiers were to wear a linen gilet, or under waistcoat that was cut square at the waist, without skirts, with loops at the hem that fastened to the buttons on the waistband of the breeches.[15] During the 1777 campaign for Philadelphia, British soldiers were depicted at the battles of Germantown and Paoli wearing square cut sleeved waistcoats with welted pockets.[16] (Fig. 25)

Figure 25: Waistcoat Styles



a. Skirted

b. Square Cut

Waistcoats could also be made with or without sleeves. While the standard issue British soldier's waistcoat was made sleeveless, those worn during the 1777 campaign had sleeves attached, and double breasted sleeved under waistcoats of swanskin flannel were issued to the Brigade of Guards when there was a shortage of great coats during the winter of 1777-78.[17] The French Army issue waistcoat of 1775 and 1779 had sleeves that were only attached to the armhole along their upper half, with the underarm seam open or closed with a linen gusset. It had a short stand collar and cuffs in the regimental facing color.[18] (Fig. 26)

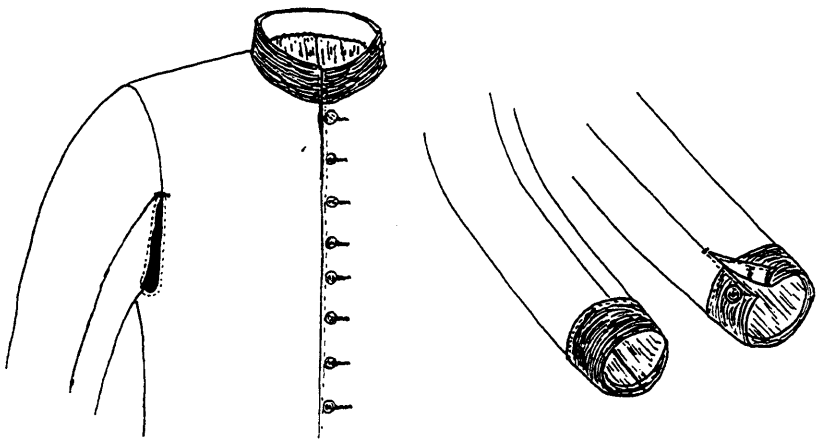
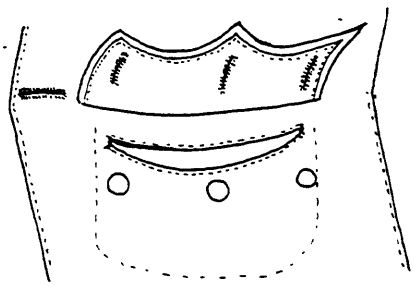


Figure 26: Sleeve Details on French Waistcoats

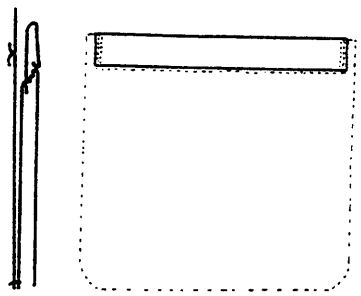
In order to support the buttons and buttonholes, especially on the unlined gilet and other types of waistcoat, a layer of linen slightly wider than the buttonholes was sewn into the center front edges between the neck edge and the waist.

There were several varieties of pocket configurations, but they can be divided into two broad classes: pockets with flaps and pockets with welts. In the first category, officers generally had waistcoats with pockets underneath both flaps, while those of the enlisted men either had a pocket under the right flap, or had no pockets at all.[19] Pocket flaps are only found on waistcoats that have skirts, placed with the top folded edge on a line with the top of the side vent and the waist button. The forward line of the flap parallels the angle of the skirts. On welted pockets the welts were about an inch wide, and six or seven inches long, with one of two pocket bags (Fig. 27).

Figure 27: Pocket Styles



a. Pockets with flaps



b. Welted Pockets

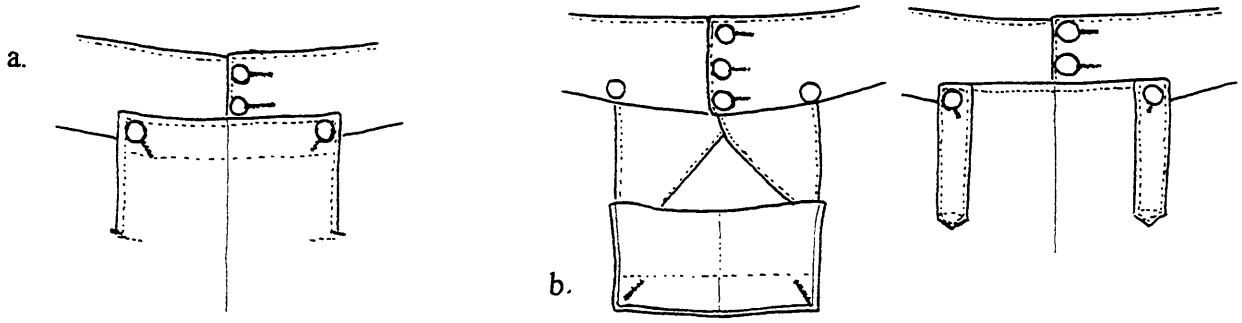
In order to improve the fit of the waistcoat at the waist, it was not uncommon on civilian waistcoats to sew on ties or to work eyelets run with a tie, located between the bottom of the rib cage and the waist. Given the relative scarcity of original examples, it is not known if this method of adjustment was used on enlisted waistcoats, but it has been found on some officer's examples.

BREECHES

We have discussed the cut and fit of breeches earlier in this presentation. Ideally, the breeches should fit smooth and snug in the front, with the lower edge of the waistband riding on top of the hip bone, while the back should be made sufficiently full to accommodate bending and sitting without pulling at the knees.

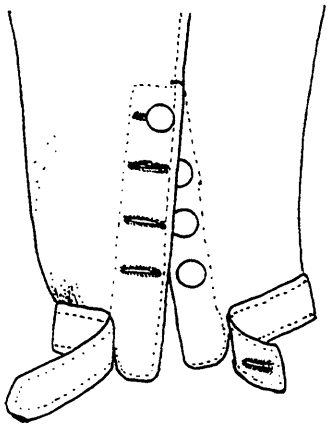
A critical element in the fit of the front is the fall, which should neither gap open at the top when standing, nor gap open at the sides when sitting. Two types of fall seem to have been in use in military clothing. The first, and apparently most common was a fall that was simply lined with a linen liner that extended only slightly lower than the side edges of the fall. The lining would be attached with a backstitch to the fall, with right sides together,then turned and topstitched with a backstitch for strength and to fix it securely to the bearer panels underneath. The top of the fall was further strengthened with a second row of topstitching, about an inch below the first. This would help to carry the strain of the buttons (Fig. 28a). The second style of fall added reinforcing plackets on each side of the fall, which extended it beyond the bearer seams and were caught into both the bearer and breeches body. The plackets were also edged with reinforcing topstitching (Fig.28b).

Figure 28: Fall Detail



The legs should be cut so that the side seams are centered on the leg and run straight, without twisting towards the front or back. The leg should come down below the front of the knee far enough so that the knee band can be tightened against the slight hollowing at the top of the shin bone. The lower edge should also be rounded to permit it to be eased onto the knee band to create a slight hollow for the knee cap. The lower part of the leg should also rise up high enough in back to clear the upper part of the calf (Fig 29).

Figure 29: Details of Knee Opening



The knee band was stitched to the lower edge of the leg, then folded up and the free edge stitched to the inside of the leg. The strap was then topstitched around its perimeter with a backstitch,approximately 1/4" from the edges. This strengthened the band and prevented stretching. The extensions of the band form a strap and tab for a button or buckle closure (Fig. 30)

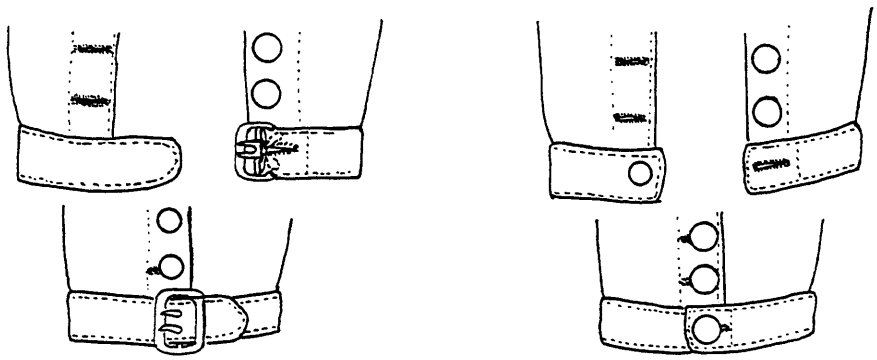


Figure 30: Knee band fastening systems

ENDNOTES

1. Bennet Cuthbertson, A System for the Compleat Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion Infantry, Dublin, 1768, Art.XXI, in Hew Strachan, British Military Uniforms,1768-96, (London:Arms & Armour Press, 1975), p.141.

2. Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts, Vol.XIX, Chapter 281, p.114.

3. Reglement Arrete par le Roi, Pour L'Habillement et L'Equipment de ses Troupes. du 21 Fevrier 1779, (Paris:L'Imprimerie Royale,
1779), p.3. [A copy is available in the A.S.K. Brown Collection, Brown University, Providence, RI.]

4. Glenn Steppler, "Redcoat: The Regimental Coat of the British Infantryman, c.1808-15", Part 2, Military Illustrated, No.21 (1989?),p.10.

5. "General Orders for the Massachusetts Line", West Point, January 5, 1781, Orderly Book of the Fourth Massachusetts Brigade, 1780-1781, Ms., John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, RI.

6. Cuthbertson, ibid., p.137-9.

7. Thomas Simes, A Military Course for the Government and Conduct of a Battalion, (London,1777) in Hew Strachan, British Military Uniforms, 1768-96, (London: Arms and ARmour Press,1975), p.190.

8. Simes, Ibid.

9. Simes, Ibid.

10. Cuthbertson, ibid., p.139-140.

11. Gisela Krause, Atlpreussische Militarbekleidungswirtschaft: Materialien und Formen, Planung und Fertigung, Wirtschaft und Wervaltung, (Osnabruck: Biblio Verlag, 1983), p.178.

12. Hill, Ibid.

13. Cuthbertson,ibid.,p.138.

14. Hill, Ibid. See also Simes, Ibid.

15. Reglement Arrete par le Roi Concernant L'Habillement et L'Equipment de ses Troupes. Du 31 Mai 1776. (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1776), p.2. Also Reglement...Du 21 Fevrier 1779, p.4.

16. These paintings by Xavier Della Gatta are in the possession of the Valley Forge Historical Society.

17. Linnea M.Bass & William W.Burke, Documentation for Uniforms of the Brigade of Guards on the American Service, 1776-1782, Typescript, 1990, p.7 "Regimental Order 2 January 1778.

18. Reglement Arrete par le Roi, Pour l'Habillement & l'Equipment de l'Infanterie, des Invalides & des Troupes-legeres, Du 2 Septembre 1775, (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1775),p.3.
Reglement...Du 21 Fevrier 1779, p.4.

19. Reglement...Du 21 Fevrier 1999, Ibid.